Susan Didn't Forget, She Chose to Live

by worddancer

Summary

This will be a collection of one-shots I write when I have feelings about Susan. I have a lot of feelings about Susan so this will probably grow. Unless stated everything will be unconnected.

Susan didn’t forget, she just choose to live.

Aslan cast her out from her home and demanded she find him in her old world.

Believing does not equal worship. A god believed in isn’t always a god who she owes tribute.

Notes

I just have so many feelings about how CS Lewis treated Susan. He's a dick and I'm going to write about it. This one shot follows cannon.
Once a Queen

Susan didn’t forget, she just choose to live.

Aslan cast her out from her home and demanded she find him in her old world.

Believing does not equal worship. A god believed in isn’t always a god who she owes tribute.

Out of her brothers and sister Susan knew she would be the one who felt the lost the most. She was the one who would never truly adjust. Peter took it as he took everything, with magnificent acceptance. It was what he did with every burden. He shouldered them and soldiered on. Edmund would never repay his betrayal in his own eyes even after a country had both forgiven and forgotten. He would take anything Aslan took away as his due, as if losing his Kingship was his right, his Christmas gift. Lucy had so much faith she didn’t need to be IN Narnia. She didn’t NEED to be queen. She could find Aslan no matter where she was, she had always been able too.

Susan was a queen. Susan didn’t know how to be anything but a queen. She knew how to form alliances, to woe ambassadors and how to subtly threaten enemies. She was called the Gentle but she knew how to wield an iron fist in a velvet glove. She could both soothe and protect her country. She never forgot her mother’s words- you can always go from being nice to being mean but you can rarely go from being mean to being nice.

She was crowned when she was twelve years old. A child queen on an unstable throne. Sure the Lion himself had breathed over her and her siblings but those outside their borders did not know this. All they knew is that the power had shifted and the Narnians believed that the God of their old legends had returned.

Susan called the Centaurs, the Dwarves, the Fauns, the Wolves and anyone else with knowledge to her. She demanded they teach her how they ruled their clans along with the ways of governing a united kingdom.

Father Christmas had gifted her a bow and she learned how to wield it. Her bow did not easily miss and in time neither did she. She worked with the archers in their army. Every day while Peter and Edmund studied the sword she studied the bow.

Even at twelve she knew gifts could be taken away.

She just didn’t know everything could be taken away.

She grew into an adult and was shoved back into her child body, returned to her land only to be ripped away forever and lost her family before she really learned that lesson.

Everything can always be taken away.

No matter what it is the Lion can always take it away if He deems it fit to do so.

And take he did.

He took her country.

He took her body.

He took her bow, her horn.
He took her purpose.

He took her family.

He shoved her through a long forgotten wardrobe, in an old but strange land and back into a long forgotten body. She tripped over her child limbs and scratched at her uncomfortable wool clothes. She couldn’t remember the scratch of wool over her skin, her feet didn’t remember the pinch of her shoes. The training bra she started wearing before they were put on the train felt awkward over her barely grown breasts. Her fingers weren’t roughened from the bow string, her muscles didn’t flex and pull with hard earned strength.

Her soft curves had been replaced by baby fat and her toned muscles had disappeared.

Her memories had not.

Her drive had not.

Once a Queen of Narnia, always a queen of Narnia.

Once a High Queen of Narnia, always a High Queen of Narnia.

This God decided to shove her back into her child body, took away her kingdom and shoved her back into a forgotten world where she had no power. This God decided her life for her without her consent. This God took away her country as if he had a right to play with her life.

Maybe he did.

He was a God after all.

The First time he sent her back to England she tried so hard to be good enough for Him.

She tried to adjust. She let her cloths scratch, her shoes pinch and her training bra lay uncomfortable over her sore growing breasts. She let her mind adjust to her old bodies schedule. She reminisced with her siblings and the professor every morning at breakfast. She remembered and gave tribute to a Lion who called himself God.

She checked the wardrobe every day.

She prayed to Him every night.

She didn’t know why her kingdom had been taken away from her like a child denied a sweet before dinner. She didn’t know who was taking care of her people with all four monarchs gone. She didn’t know how the negotiations for the alliance between Archenland were going now that she wasn’t there to marry the king’s nephew. She didn’t know if they would return. She didn’t know what she did to loose her kingdom but she’d damn well do everything she could to earn it back.

She looked everyday, she knew the others did too. All of them shoved in strange bodies just wanting to go home.

She didn’t know at the time how wonderful the professor was. Somehow the old man who had only known them as children was able to treat them as the adults they were. He offered wine at dinner and didn’t laugh when it tasted cruel and bitter on their children tongues. He trusted them to figure out their new bodies, new limbs. He found old fencing foils for Peter and Edmund to train with, a bow for Susan and books on healing for Lucy.
Susan started to retrain her child eyes and child muscles. She knew she’d have to earn her callouses again. She found old cloths and remembered how to make her fingers sew to bring them down and fit her. She ran and did the exercises she did in Narnia. She searched her twenty-seven year old brain to find the exercises she did fifteen years earlier now that her body was twelve again.

She learned how to move in her body again. She remembered the stories of this land.

And then the war ended.

They went back to London.

It had been sixteen years since Susan had seen her parents. One year in this world. It took her a long time to find her mother’s face in the train station. Even though she was twenty-seven (thirteen) she ran into her mother’s arms and hoped it would be better.

It wasn’t.

She was still a Queen without a kingdom. She was still an adult in a child’s body.

Now she was treated as a child as well.

The professor was able to treat them as adults, he had been to Narnia. He knew Aslan. He knew of God’s who played with lives. He knew of the things they had seen. He knew that they were adults for all they were shoved in children’s bodies.

When Susan went back to London she asked her parents for archery lessons.

They laughed at her.

Susan couldn’t remember the last time she had been laughed at for a request. Maybe when she was fifteen and in a bit of a foolish tizzy about a visiting delegation from a neighboring kingdom. One of her Ladies in Waiting, a centaur only a little older than herself had giggled at a particularly silly request. It had been silly, the giggle had snapped Susan from a fifteen year old girl getting ready for a party and back into her role as queen.

She’d never been laughed at for something practical.

She could feel her old but still strange face trying to arrange it’s baby fat into a queenly, commanding look before Peter kicked her under the table.

She wasn’t a queen here.

She wasn’t anything here.

She was a girl-child with no power and commanded no respect. It didn’t matter if her request was practical or silly. It didn’t matter that she had been a diplomat for the last twelve years.

It didn’t matter.

Peter though, Peter was now a boy of fourteen. HE was allowed ideas in this backwards world. He supported her request, saying the Professor had begun to teach Edmund and him to fence and shown Susan the bow.

Her parents listened to this.

In this world she wasn’t a queen. She was a girl and she didn’t matter.
She didn’t matter.

She didn’t matter in this world, she was just a girl, waiting to be a woman, married and bearing children.

She learned this lesson quickly.

She learned it when she asked for books on government at school with Lucy and her teacher laughed at her. She learned it when she expressed interest in learning how to host parties in England and was encouraged but told it was a woman’s skill, an unimportant skill. As if alliances weren’t born and killed in ballrooms as they were in council rooms. As if an insult in a seating arrangement wasn’t as grave as an insult in a treaty meeting. As if those didn’t happen side by side.

Edmund had stopped wars with his spies.

Susan had stopped wars with her parties.

She had gathered her potential enemies together and showered them in kindness and hospitality. She smiled, she flattered. Peter showed his strength in arms, Susan showed her strength in culture, Edmund in his ability to move in the shadows and Lucy in her faith in goodness.

This was as important as battles on fields. Susan knew she saved the lives of her people by helping stop wars before they started.

Here in England the body count didn’t matter if the glory of the crown was won.

A woman had no place in that glory.

Susan schooled her child face, round with baby fat, to take on the haughty, queenly look she learned to wield in court. She glared the teachers who said she couldn’t rule the world. She snuck over to the boy’s campus and broke into the library and took the books they refused to give her. Peter helped her get her archery lessons and brought her copies of his calculus homework.

She would be worthy of her Kingdom when she returned. She never doubted that she’d return.

And then she was pulled out of a train station and dropped back into her country so far into the future that the years didn’t matter. She wasn’t a Queen anymore, she was a Legend.

She just wanted her kingdom back.

She just wanted her country to be whole again.

She just wanted her identity, her body, her power back.

She didn’t want to be a legend. She just wanted to be a queen again. She wanted to take care of her people. She was twenty eight and fourteen and she was tired of being held to the whims of a Lion.

Was it so bad to know her own power, be taken away from it and want it back?

Was it so bad to know that she could not only rule but rule well.

Was it so bad to want to be more than a girl waiting to be a woman, waiting to be a mother?

Did she deserve to be ripped away from her land again and banished forever?
Did she deserve to be exiled from the country that owned her blood and tears?

Did she fail this Lion God?

She did not deserve his judgement. She had always done what was best for her land and her people.

When the Lion shoved them back into the world, back into England, back into this pathetic country where she was nothing, Susan mourned.

She mourned the loss of the past year as she hadn’t before.

The first time was about making herself worthy of her country.

Now she never would be. She never would sit in her throne room again. She would never ride her horse. She would never practice her bow in the courtyard. She would never take council with her subjects and learn of their lives. She would never host parties that decided the fate of her kingdom. She would never act a council or ambassador again.

The centaurs had a tradition of mourning for one year and one day. The wolves mourned until the next full moon where they would run and tell stories of their fallen. The druids danced their mourning dances. The merfolk sang their mourning songs. The nymphs stilled the waters and did not speak. Susan took to her bed for a week, hardly touching food or water. The school called her parents worried about the undetectable malady that had fallen her. Lucy sat with her, telling her the old fairy tales of their abandoned kingdom. Susan turned her back to her sister. Peter and Edmund came from the boys campus. She turned her back to them too.

She would never be good enough for her kingdom.

Her people had been taken away from her like a child who looses a toy.

All because a Lion said so.

She thought he finally had taken everything from her.

She was wrong.

Before had been about becoming good enough for her kingdom. Now was about becoming good enough for this world. She stopped hiding her Queenliness and glared at teachers who tried to cow her. She breezed through lessons she had learned years ago and demanded to be taught more.

She argued politics and policy. She put together seating arrangements with a diplomatic eye. She gathered the girls of her school around her. She learned her bow again and set it aside. It had no place in this world.

She picked it up again because it deserved to be remembered.

She learned to paint her face again, the style here different than Narnia. She learned to sneak out of her dorm and find her way into the city. She learned to style her hair and pick out her clothes. She knew the power of presentation, the power of a smile. She met boys from the boys school behind the woodshed and kissed them. She met girls in her dorm and she kissed them too. She had nothing yet everything to prove in this world.

This world where she thought there was nothing left to take.

“Find me in your own world.” a God had told her.
She had lived in Narnia for fifteen years and in this world for fifteen also. What world was truly hers?

She was Susan the Gentle, Susan of the Horn, High Queen. She refused to become Susan the Damned.

She stopped giving a Lion tribute. A God who took everything was not a God she owed.

Her siblings said she forgot. She never forgot. She took the twisted promises of a Lion and made them her own. She kept her promise to Him. She’d live in this world but she’d live her way, not his.

She is not her brother Peter who is still respected and given responsibilities and listened to in this world. She is not Edmund who will never escape the guilt of a childhood mistake. She is not Lucy who builds herself in faith and trust. She is the Gentle, the promised, the chosen and she is put in a land that cares for none of that.

She might not have her kingdom but she is still a Queen. She will be a Queen until she dies.

The same train station that pulled her back to Narnia took her family away for good. She knew why they were traveling. Edmund had called her as she was pressing her hair for the birthday of the latest girl she had kissed. Told her of the dreams, the rings. Susan felt the responsibility of a kingdom she could no longer rule press down into her very bones. She is twenty-one for the second time and the ache of responsibility has never left her.

But Narnia no longer welcomes her and she will not give its God her blood anymore.

Out of all her siblings Edmund is the one who understands. He returns out of Duty to Country. She stays out of Duty to Self.

She loses them all.

Peter who was allowed to still carry his Duty wrapped around him like a cloak. Edmund who weighed each word whispered with justice on his tongue. Lucy, sweet Lucy, who loved so much she never had to look to find the Lion. The Professor and Polly, gentle hands who guided them. Eustance and Jill, children who Narnia had shaped and molded into people who could change the world.

Taken.

She attends their funerals alone. She burries her siblings next to her parents dressed in black with her nylons on and her lipstick slashed red against her lips. She holds the hand of the girl who’s birthday she had gone to. A party instead of a train. The mourners look at her, a girl barely out of her youth, holding the hand of a friend and burying the decaying flesh of her taken family.

Susan is twenty one and she still remembers the first time she was twenty one. The callouses built from a bow and a quill. The weight of her crown on her head. The responsibility of a queen. Now she is twenty one again and there is a different weight of grief pressing into her over burdened shoulders.

The night Susan lays her family in the ground she sleeps next to the girl who held her hand and dreams of a Lion for the first time in years.

“Daughter of Eve, return to me.” He calls to her as if he has a right to her loyalty.

“No.” she looks him the eye.
In the morning she wakes and turns to the woman in bed next to her.

“I’m moving to America. Will you come with?”

The third time Susan leaves her country it is because she choose to. She has her bags packed, her inheritance in the bank and in her pocket. She has her lovers hand in hers. She has her lipstick and her nylons. She has her pen, her parties, her politics and her policies.

Susan didn’t forget, she just choose to live.
**Promises Made to Gods**

Chapter Summary

Susan was twenty one or forty six depending on how one did the math. She stared at the fresh graves. She thought about her obligations, to call the stone cutter, commission the grave markers. She had to settle their affairs and sort through their things. The Professor had left Peter the house, now hers as she was the last. The only one to survive.

Chapter Notes

**TRIGGER WARNINGS!!!!! MENTIONS OF SUICIDAL IDEATION. NO SUICIDE HAPPENS. MENTIONS OF GRIEF RELATED DEPRESSION!!!!!**

Susan didn’t forget, she chose to live.

She chose to live in this dreary, ugly world she had been exiled to.

Susan attended the funerals of her brothers and sister in a black dress and her reddest lipstick and her best pair of nylons. She stood when she was supposed to, sat, bowed her head and mouthed along prayers she didn’t believe in.

How could she believe in this world's God when another world’s God had taken her family away.

After the service she stood at the freshly covered mounds of dirt and asked the deacon for a moment alone to remember.

“Pray child.” The man said, stuffed up with his own thoughts of importance, “Pray for their souls and for your salvation.”

“I don’t need to. I owe this God nothing.” Susan answered, her voice cracked and broken from the tears she had yet to cry. The deacon stared at her before he shook his head for her lost soul and walked away.

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“You’ve taken everything, I owe you nothing.” Susan whispered to the wind, her voice hard and cold. “I watched you die, I ran beside you and I rode on your back. I gave you all of the love a God deserves and you exiled me to this miserable place and I promised to live here. You took my kingdom and my family. We are done you and I.”

If she felt the wind pick up and whistle through the trees she paid it no mind as she turned her back to the graves and went home to her dingy little flat. She unplugged the phone from the wall and laid
herself on her bed where she finally was able to cry herself to sleep. She hadn’t dreamed of Lions in years and she did not dream of them that night. It was three days before she left her bed for anything but water or the bathroom again.

The Lion lost his right to be worshipped the moment he exiled her.

He lost that right when he took every bit of allegiance she’d given him and spit it back in her face.

She grew from child to adult in the shadow of his blessing. She protected his people and done everything he had demanded of her and he choose to shove her back to childhood all over again.

It was no blessing to be a girl-child in England.

“Sit quietly Susan.”

“Don’t make so much noise Susan.”

“Girls don’t study politics Susan.”

Sit down, shut up and keep your legs closed. That’s all she was worth in this Aslan-forsaken country. She was of no consequence until she married and became a mother. That was her job in life. A middle class girl grew into a middle class woman who did not work, had babies and kept her home.

Susan had already done this. A Queen is mother to her country. She cared for her people as a mother does her children. Her blood was in every inch of the land, the land itself was her home and she kept it with pride. The God of that land might be magical but she was real. Susan knit her very bones into the land he gave her to protect it.

And he took it away. He abandoned her people to scramble without their rulers and exiled her to a cold and dreary place.

How dare he?

How dare he take her away from her world.

She grew into an adult knowing that the only people she owed anything were the people who depended on her. She was a queen and she owed her life to her people. She did not owe anything to this God.

Not any more. He could not take everything and expect her to give more.

She would not do that anymore. She refused to keep cutting bits of herself off, if she kept going she’d have nothing left. She barely had anything left now. The only pieces of herself that she carried were the pieces she built after the Lion cast her off.

It wasn’t a sin to live in the world she was banished too. Preserving herself wasn’t a crime. Choosing to live instead of condemning herself to mourn for a kingdom that she’d never return to is what she promised Aslan himself she’d do.

How dare he condemn her for following his orders.

She did not owe him anything more than her promise and she kept her word.

She called Narnia a children’s game in order to make the pain a little less. The pain never truly went away though. She learned to live around it like a broken limb you avoid moving until it’s healed.
It never did heal though. It never would, it would always be a bruise that’s she’d return to poke again and again.

At twenty-one, after she buried her family, almost ten years after she’d been exiled the first time she still woke up expecting a tiger to come in and tell her what meetings she had that day. Nine years of exile did not erase fifteen years of ruling. She looked at her desk expecting to see tax and crop reports instead of half finished memo’s. She still expected people to fall quiet and listen when she spoke.

She still expected people to respect her.

No, nine years of exile did not release fifteen years of being a queen.

Once a queen of Narnia, always a queen of Narnia.

Being a queen gave her the skills to demand her place in the university. She demanded her place in the sociology halls and the political science halls. She held her head high as her classmates laughed at her ideas.

It was easier when they laughed then when they turned their heads in pity. It was easier to keep her head high when they doubted her. She knew herself. She was not only a queen but a high queen of an entire country. It was hard when they pitied her. It was hard when they fell silent while she walked down the hall. When they stared at her with blank and pitiful expressions, when they fell silent as she spoke.

She did not want the respect of her peers to be built on the bones of her family.

She did not want her life to be built on exile, broken dreams and stubbornly kept promises.

Aslan did not care what she wanted.

This much was clear.

She kept her promise to this God however. She lived in this world even after he took everything from her. Even after she lay in her bathtub, knife by the side of the porcelain, water long gone cold. It would have been so easy to escape the pity filled stares, the words whispered behind hands and the doubt radiating from her professors.

Maybe she’d want to study something more appropriate for an orphan. With the tragic accident she didn’t need the extra worry, the extra stress. She should take some time off, she should rest. She should not come back. It was foolish when she had a family, now it was insane. She should leave. It would be so easy to escape from everything.

So easy to let the knife slip through her skin and join her family.

She had almost been on that train but she had had an exam the next day. She couldn’t miss it, she’d never be allowed a makeup exam. Plus it hurt so much to keep remembering a land she could never return to. She didn’t think they could go back. She didn’t think Aslan would let her go back.

She didn’t want to try and find out she still wasn’t allowed home.

She stayed and now everyone was gone.

It would be so easy to join them.
But she made a promise to a Lion when she was 13 (or 27 depending on the math). She promised she would live in the world he damned her too. She might say she forgot, she might say it was a child's game and she might curse the god that damned her but Susan kept her promises.

She kept her promise to her people until a Lion forced her to break it.

She’d keep her promise to the Lion even though she thought the pain might break her. She wouldn’t let it break her. She’d never let the Lion break her. As close as it came she pulled herself out of the bathtub and picked up the knife.

She stared at the blade- her choice already made. She’d keep her promise to a Lion God and she would live. Her wet hair hung in heavy snakes dripping down her shoulders. She remembered daggers she’d held in self defence, in war and in practice. It may have been nine years ago but she had trained her body to remember the lessons of being a queen. She learned to fight alongside her brothers in Narnia.

She pricked her finger on the tip of the knife and watched the small bit of blood swell under her finger tip. A drop so small that it would only stain the snow of an old fairy tale. She stuck her finger in her mouth and sucked the blood away until it was just a memory- like her family. She carried the knife back with her to the bedroom, trailing a river of dripping water behind her, and put it in the top drawer of the bedside table. She left it there, not to use but to act as a reminder of her promise.

A promise to a God and a promise to herself. She would live and she wouldn’t let it break her.

The next time she met a fellow student’s eye with pity in his gaze she stared back with defiance and grace. She had not been raised a queen to lose it all now. When a professor suggested she might like to try a different degree like typing or teaching she smiled coldly and told him no thank you. She took all the bits inside of her that had made her a diplomat and sewed them together to create an armour around herself.

They didn’t need to know she still heard the barbs they spit when they thought she couldn’t hear. They didn’t need to know she cataloged every time she heard grudging respect.

The respect might be built on a foundation of the bones of her family but she’d build those walls herself.

She declined invitations and still cried herself dry every week until she thought she’d become a withered shell of a woman. It was her secret to know and keep. Just as it was her secret to know and keep when she had a panic attack on the train. It was easier to say she liked the fresh air and exercise than explain why she walked everywhere.

Still she finished her degree, and her graduate degree, and her doctorate degree. It didn’t matter if no one would hire a woman. She had the inheritance of her dead family to live off of she’d bitterly remind herself. Still she did find a job, beneath her education but a job in government. Her desk was once again filled with tax reports and farming documents.

She kept the knife in the bedside table every time she moved as a reminder of how close she came and the promises she made. She might have been the blessed in Narnia but here in England she was the damned.

In Narnia she kept the company of other woman. No one said a word, it was not strange as the Animals did too. Here in London she found her way to secret clubs in basements and in quiet house parties hidden from a neighbor's eyes. Two spinsters who lived together for twenty years were just old maids to a passerby. She found women who whispered secrets of birth control and abortions
from one ear to another. She learned how to evacuate a womb with herbs and teas. She wrote about
the Jane network in America and praised them. She learned their method.

If she could be queen of a country any woman could be queen of her own body.

She did not celebrate the birthday’s of her family but once a year, on the day they died, she went to
church and sat at their graves and told a God that she still remembered her promise.

Susan promised to live and that is what she did. She also promised herself she’d live on her terms-
not a Gods.
Susan The Gentle

Chapter Summary

Susan never forgot Narnia but some days she wished she had. She wished it was just a child’s game. She wished she had been allowed to be a child in both this strange world that was starting to feel like hers again but also in the world born of magic where a Lion put four children on four thrones.

Susan never forgot Narnia, she pretended she could. She held quiet memorials for her memories when shaken awake by nightmares but she never forgot. She just built herself into the world she was given (exiled) to.

Chapter Notes

Here's my latest installment of my feelings about Susan. My thoughts for this one were Words are Powerful. That's the statement I took my inspiration from. This one isn't really dark and I don't think it has any trigger warnings.

I just have a lot of feels about Susan and it's fine. This one explores the fact that they were all children when they went to Narnia and adults when they were sent back.

Susan was twelve years old and could count the number of times she’d been truly afraid on one hand.

One- when she was five years old and she lost her Mum in the store. She didn’t cry because even at five Susan was already a stoic little mother. She found the checkout girl and told the young woman she was lost. The woman helped her find her mother and that night everyone told her how brave and clever she had been.

“But I was scared.” Susan told her mother.

“Sometimes being scared but doing something anyway means you're extra brave.”

Two- When Susan was eight years old she got sent away to school for the first time. That first night she had a nightmare and it was the first time she couldn’t run into her mother’s arm.

Even girls who are a little too serious, a little too motherly need their own mothers.

Three- When Susan was ten years old she climbed to the highest part of a tall tree in the orchard. She was alone- running from her siblings, from the role that had been handed to her and the one she’d picked up in a child’s hands. Sometimes even at ten Susan didn't want to be the little mother. She didn’t want to be her mother’s pretty, good, kind, nice, responsible girl. She wanted to run down the hall like Peter and Edmund or sit and dream like Lucy.

Lucy was born dreaming and Susan liked to think she died dreaming too.
On this summer day Susan wanted to run and so she did. She climbed a tree and fell crashing to the ground and broke her arm. She lay there for over an hour waiting for someone to find her. No one did and Susan picked herself off the cold ground and cradled her aching broken arm and walked home.

Some girls were dreamers and some were mothers.

Four- When Susan was twelve her mother clipped a tag on her jacket and the jacket of her siblings. Her parents put them on a train to go out into the country to stay with a man they had never met but was (maybe) distantly related to her mother. She was packed and parceled like a package and sent away.

“Take care of your brothers and sister.” her mother said.

“Who is going to take care of me?” she thought.

People forget that little mothers need to be taken care of.

Five- “I found a woods in a wardrobe.”

Her sister had gone mad. There was nothing but mothballs, coats and wood in that wardrobe. She swore she’d been gone for hours but not even minutes passed. Fauns didn’t exist. Lampposts did not appear in forests. Witches did not create winters with no Christmas and countries did not grow out of mothballs and wardrobes.

Her sister had gone mad and they were away from home and her mother had told her to take care of all of them but especially Lucy. Especially the dreamer. Susan had failed her mother and failed herself. She’d taken duty on as a mantle on her thin child’s shoulders and she’d been found wanting because her sister had gone mad.

Susan was twelve and she couldn’t count her fear anymore.

Fauns existed. Lampposts could be found in forests. Witches existed and they tricked her little brother. Winter without Christmas existed. Countries could be found in wardrobes. She failed a different sibling.

She was promised. Her, the little mother, her brothers, the leader and the quiet sneaky one, and her sister, the dreamer. They were promised, waited for, expected.

They were children. They were children who were called to fight a witch who had reigned for more than all their years put together. They had gifts given to them by a story she’d outgrown years ago. Her eight year old sister held a knife, she held a bow and her brother held a sword. She was given a weapon and then told not to fight for herself or her family.

She couldn’t fight for her country because it wasn’t hers yet. She didn’t know these people, this land, their stories. She was promised idea whispered from mothers mouth to child's ear. She wasn’t a person to them, not yet and if she couldn’t be a person she couldn’t claim ownership or authority of this bit of land.

She had a horn to call for help and a bow she didn’t know how to use.

Even at twelve she knew she would learn though. Father Christmas and the Lion God might not want her to fight but Susan knew better. She knew that a queen was mother to her country and she knew a mother was called to fight for her children. She’d already fought bullies off of her dreamer sister. A bigger bully now held her sneaky little brother and she would fight to get him back. In their
camp of desperate fighters she found a centaur to teach her how to wield her bow. She found her arrows didn’t miss with the mythical gift and asked for a different bow. If she was going to wield one she was going to learn one.

She also found a dwarf to teach Lucy to wield her knife. She never wanted that little blade to be stained with blood but she knew the best way to protect her sister was if her sister could protect herself.

Father Christmas and Aslan wanted them to be gentle, wanted Edmond to be a lesson and Peter to be a leader. Susan knew she couldn’t protect these people who put their faith in the legend of these four children of Adam and Eve and keep her hands completely clean.

She wondered- years later as she looked at kingdom budgets and food shortages and wondered how could she tax her people to pay for the food they needed to survive- if that’s how Jadis had started. Had Jadis ever been a young girl trying to keep her people fed and knew that no matter what she did someone would go hungry?

The golden years did not start on the day they were crowned but about five years into their reign. Five years of learning how to flatter diplomats, train armies, tax citizens, sell jewels, buy food and run a kingdom. Five years of Peter becoming the face of the monarchy. Five years of Susan becoming the beautiful queen and diplomat. Five years of Edmond becoming the Shadow King, his spies bringing them all information about their new world. Five years of Lucy becoming both the most loved and the most underestimated of them all. Her dreamer's eyes saw the things others missed. She whispered to Susan what diplomat liked what foods and Susan arranged her parties and her meetings with these in mind.

Words have power. Susan knew this, she watched Edmond weigh each word carefully on his tongue before speaking. She saw the weight of his mistakes pressing into her bones. She watched as her people listed eagerly, hungrily, for each word Peter spoke. She watched the genuine smiles that her sister's voice evoked. Words held so much power and it scared her.

They had called Jadis the High Queen. Jadis called herself High Queen. She became a dictator. Susan learned the stories. She knew how Aslan breathed life into this world and everything grew including the Lamppost. Everything but Jadis, everything but one Son of Adam and one Daughter of Eve and Jadis. Jadis who had already aged beyond what they knew. Jadis who had seen centuries and worlds live and die. Jadis who forgot what it meant to be queen. Jadis who forgot that the people in her kingdom were hers to take care of, hers to watch over, hers to guard.

Jadis who somewhere went from Queen to Dictator long before she ever stepped foot on Narnian soil. Jadis who was called High Queen.

Words are powerful and Susan was terrified of them. She was terrified of becoming so jaded to the needs of her people she became the last High Queen of Narnia. She clung to the title the Gentle with a white knuckled grip.

She knew she wasn’t gentle. A mother was a lioness bathing in the sun until someone threatened her cubs. Than she’d rip the flesh from the offenders bones and bathe in his blood to warn every other threat off. Susan had always been a mother. As Susan grew from a girl-mother into an adult queen she realized that she never had truly been a child.

A mother to her siblings. A mother to her country at twelve. A diplomat by fourteen. There was no place for a child on a throne. Or at least no place for four children and while Susan might not be the oldest she was always the responsible one. Peter would think of games of pretend for them to play and Susan would find the costumes and props. Peter planned, Susan created, Edmund horded his
secrets and Lucy dreamed.

Some girls were allowed to stay dreamers. Some girls were never allowed to be them in the first place.

She spent twelve years in England, most of the memories faded and forgotten. She spent fifteen years in Narnia. By the 5th year she began to feel comfortable on her throne and confident in her choices. By the 10th year she’d forgotten her favorite book in England and her favorite dress. She couldn’t remember the smell of her father’s cologne or her mother’s perfume. By the 12th year she couldn’t call their faces to memory and began to wonder if England had been a dream.

(She knew it wasn’t but it was easier to think that maybe it was a childhood game. Maybe she’d been brought to this world from Aslan’s breath at twelve and never had a mother or father for whom she cried over for the first two years.)

(She’d try to play this same game later when she was exiled from her kingdom. It didn’t work in England either.)

By the time she’d been a queen for fifteen years she couldn’t remember the drafty old country house her siblings had stayed in for a few short weeks. She couldn’t remember being parceled like a package for her safety. She couldn’t remember being lost in a store.

She could remember being afraid. She could remember picking herself off the cold ground and walking home cradling a broken arm. No matter how much your family loved you sometimes you were on your own. Even when you were Queen. After fifteen years Susan still clutched the title the Gentle with white knuckled fists. She knew now more than ever words had power. She’d written tax codes, school charters, treaties, letters, invitations and seating arrangements that guided the course of her country.

Then she was shoved back into a forgotten land in a forgotten body. Suddenly she was twelve again with a 27 year old mind. Her fingers had been permanently ink stained, her hair had fallen almost to her feet when it was unbound, her beauty had brought suitors from seven kingdoms.

Now her hips were strange and narrow, her chest flat, her hair dull and her face still round with baby fat. Her body was a stranger and her mind remembered everything. Her mind remembered being handed a bow that couldn’t miss and told not to defend what she had been promised for. Her mind remembered a Lion breathing his blessing on her. Her mind remembered selling off every single jewel she could find so her people could make it through the year the crops all died. Her mind remembered every sleepless night she spent pouring over political theory and trying to find the best way to stay the Gentle.

That first week back she tried to trace her hands over her body every morning when she woke up. There was a long mirror in the room she had here in the drafty mansion her twelve year old body knew and her twenty seven year old mind couldn’t remember. As a Queen of twenty seven she had been comfortable with her body. Knew every plane and curve. Now shoved back into her twelve year old skin she couldn’t bring herself to look.

Her beauty was gone but her beauty had never truly resided in her skin. It came from building her life and her bones into a country that she had been promised to. It came from sleepless nights and a neck bare because the jewels had been sold. It came from the posture of bearing the weight of a country on her shoulders. It came from accepting her duty and learning a bow that can miss. It came from trying to forage marriage alliances and fleeing in the night for safety. It came from knowing that Gentle was more than just a title it was also a promise.
This body held none of that but her mind still did. She had built her hopes and her dreams and her promises into a country she couldn’t return to and was shoved back into a country she no longer belonged to.

“I once help command armies.” she thought.

“I’ve held dying soldiers in my hands praying Lucy and cordial arrived in time.”

“I have seen war and I have treated peace.”

“I have held widows and children, I have raised funds. I made a difference.”

But here in this country that was not hers her hands were useless. She was exiled from a city that was too dangerous for children.

A Lion had thrown her into war at the age of twelve all because he promised her to a country born of magic.

He exiled her and he brought her back at his convenience. He brought her back to be the promised legend. No longer the future but the past come back to haunt the broken walls of Cair Paravel. She did her duty and her reward was permanent exile. She was twenty eight years old shoved into thirteen year old skin. She had been promised, she had been forgotten, she had been brought back and now she was to be exiled again.

“Find me in your world.” a Lion told her.

Where was she to find him? In the girls who whispered about marriage, boys and sex?

Sex is beautiful she wanted to tell them as they giggled at night, her twenty nine years pressing into her fourteen year old skin. Sex is fun, it is silly, it is one of the closest ways to touch another person. Sex doesn’t have to happen only with men. There are many ways to love- including to love yourself.

Should she find him in boys (they might be five, six, seven, twenty years older than her body but she wasn’t fourteen was she, not really) who returned home broken from war. Should she find him in their eyes that were still haunted by sights on the battlefield.

She wanted to tell them she’s seen what they’ve seen. She’s looked the beast in the face and shot an arrow at it’s heart. She wanted to tell them that peace would last for a little while because it always did but there would be another war. She wanted to tell them that it was ok to wake up screaming from nightmares and running to turn on every light to make sure the blood in your dreams didn’t soak into the waking world. She wanted to tell them she knew what it was like to never leave the battlefield behind. She wanted to tell them she knew the weight of taking a life and it was a weight that never left. Or it was a weight that should never leave because carrying that weight meant you were still human, the battle didn’t take all of you.

Was she supposed to find him in the woman who left their disapproving families and became nurses on the front lines. Was she supposed to find him in the woman who took it one step farther and became soldiers themselves?

When her body turned sixteen and her mind turned 31 she began to sneak away from home, away from school, away, away, away and she walked back on to the battlefield. Not as a commander, not as a soldier but as a nurse, as a medic. The trainers were shocked to see how quickly her soft, uncalloused hands picked up the art of splints and bandages. She worked in every hospital she could walk, bike, train, tube or bribe a ride too. She befriended soldiers and helped them heal in body as much as she could.
She knew enough of war that she couldn’t help them heal their minds.

She couldn’t even heal her own.

She befriended another nurse. One of the women who did more than bandage wounds. One who carried a gun in her pressed white skirt. She asked the woman to teach her the weapons of this world.

Her body might be sixteen but her mind still remembered the countless hours practicing and honing her eye. She picked up the gun as quickly as she picked up the bandages.

At seventeen Susan graduated and left home to move in with the woman who taught her how to shoot a gun. The second bedroom in their little flat was a pretty well lit office. Susan studied languages and policy because those were the lessons of her first childhood and they were too precious to lose. Her lover studied codes and secrets because this war might be ending but there would always be another one. There would always be another High Queen with no gentle title to hold her to her kingdom.

Was she supposed to find the Lion in her lovers eyes? In the touch of their skin sliding against each other, naked and sweating in the summer heat. Was she supposed to find him in her lovers laugh? Or maybe in her touch?

Four years in her final exile did not erase fifteen years of responsibility, of being the little mother, of being the Gentle. She still sometimes woke from nightmares of seeing her people lying dead on the battlefield but now amongst the centaur, wolf, dwarf, mouse, otter, beaver, nymph, dyad bodies there lay the bodies of Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve- the soldiers of this world. She refused to look for the Lion in her dreams. She thought they might be the one place she might always find him and the one place she couldn’t bear to remember him.

Nightmares plagued her when she was a Queen and they plagued her from the moment of her first exile. Now she had someone to wake with her every night. Someone who carried her own demons, who carried nightmares of her own. On bad nights they made tea and sat on the floor and told fairy stories back and forth. They changed them though- little girls didn’t get eaten by wolves but instead cut the stomach open themselves. They did not let princes climb their hair but cut it themselves and made a rope. They did not trade their legs for the heart of a boy but for love of the hills. They did not eat poison apples but instead turned the stranger away. They did not beg a Fairy Godmother for glass slippers but walked away before the slippers were ever needed.

Susan never forgot Narnia but some days she wished she had. She wished it was just a child’s game. She wished she had been allowed to be a child in both this strange world that was starting to feel like hers again but also in the world born of magic where a Lion put four children on four thrones.

Susan couldn’t remember how old she was, was she twenty one or thirty six? Did it matter? They were gone. They were taken. She didn’t know if it was a freak accident or a cruel Lion’s joke. It didn’t matter. Just like when she was eight years old her family didn’t come back for her, didn’t come to find her cradling her broken heart.

But she wasn’t alone. Her lovers hand was clasped tightly in her own- as tightly as she used to grip the word Gentle. She wore her stockings and her lipstick because they anchored her to this world. This world she lived in, this world she couldn’t, wouldn’t leave. Like her jewels, dresses, hair and crown had given her comfort and power in diplomatic meetings in Narnia her nylons and lipstick gave her the courage to face every “I’m so sorry” and “My thoughts are with you.”

She lasted three days before she broke. Crying in gasping heartbroken sobs that ripped their way from her chest, a monster fighting its way from her ribcage, a lioness over her dead cubs body. The
last time she cried like this was when she discovered she was twenty seven inside thirteen year old skin.

This time though there were strong, soft arms around her. Susan clasped her lovers hand and traced every callous there. Different than how her own hands had once felt, callouses from a gun- not a bow- but callouses that matched her own in this body. In this world she’d built herself back into. It still didn’t feel right. This world might never feel right again but her lovers arms felt like home.

Susan never forgot Narnia, she pretended she could. She held quiet memorials for her memories when shaken awake by nightmares but she never forgot. She just built herself into the world she was given (exiled) to.
Sometimes Susan remembered England.

Sometimes it was easier to tell herself that her life started at twelve and everything before was just a dream from a long time ago. Especially when she was twenty, twenty-one, twenty-five. Especially when she’d been a queen in Narnia longer than she had ever been a child in England. Narnia was her world and her responsibility—England was just a dream.

Sometimes Susan remembered Narnia. She remembered how Mrs. Beaver smelt of home, safety and comfort. She remembered that she could rule her own body. That she could stop wars from happening in the first place. She could prevent children from coming home from the front lines with lost and haunted eyes. She could lose herself in books and meetings and in a lover’s body. She could be something.

Sometimes Susan remembered Narnia and it didn’t matter. She could never go back and even if she could it wouldn’t be her land. It’d be somewhere new all over again. Somewhere where the time had passed to the point where she wasn’t even a legend anymore. Where not even the Badgers knew her name. Countries change and grow and she was now a relic of a forgotten past.

Chapter Notes

No major trigger warnings for this chapter. No content warnings either. This time I looked at Susan remembering England living in Narnia and how after years her memories of her childhood in England would fade. I also wanted to look at Susan knowing she could never go back to Narnia, to the queen she was and deciding not to chase the idea of it when she returned. Instead, she decided to settle for what was good enough.

Enjoy and please comment! I’ve been amazed at what people have said so far!

Sometimes Susan remembered England. She remembered that first year when nightmares of blood and bodies mixed with nightmares of being parceled away from the city as the stars lit on fire and rocks fell from the sky. She remembered England when she couldn’t be sure where the blood from her dreams came from. Those nights she called for a candle and a history book. After all she couldn’t go back and this world needed her to know their stories.

Sometimes Susan remembered England. She remembered clothes that didn’t fit quite right because of rations and shortages. She remembered her mother stitching by candle light because the electricity was turned off so the Germans couldn’t find them. She remembered the time her mother went to the black market and found a box of stale cookies and brought them home to painstakingly share. Those days she rushed to her next meeting with the druids and the Animals who lived in their branches to
Sometimes Susan remembered her mother. She saw her mother in Mrs. Beavers face as the old Animal sat her down at fifteen to make sure Susan knew where kits came from. She had some trouble calling up her mother’s face but Mrs. Beaver smelled like the river and the woods and home and that seemed close to how her mother must have smelt. Those times she buried her face into the Animals coarse fur and tried to forget she couldn’t remember what scent her mother had used before the war.

Sometimes Susan remembered her father. She remembered when she watched the soldiers come home from their battles. She saw the shadows of death in their eyes. She couldn’t remember her father’s cologne but she remembered how he looked. After he came home injured. Before they were sent away. Before the sky exploded and her home became unsafe. She traded one war for another and so did he.

Children couldn’t stay in England but they could be brought and promised to a entire country. One ruled by a witch and governed by magic.

Sometimes she remembered England. Sometimes she remembered feeling trapped by the weight of responsibility that she took on before she ever knew what it would cost. Sometimes she remembered clothes that scratched and shoes that pinched. She remembered feeling powerless to her mother’s fear and her father’s broken spirit.

Sometimes Susan remembered England and she didn’t want to. She didn’t want to remember being twelve and feeling unsettled in her bones. She didn’t want to remember being afraid and not being able to do anything about it. She didn’t want to remember any of that.

Sometimes she did though. When she was twelve, thirteen, fourteen, sometimes she’d remember. Sometimes it’d be in the day and she’d run to the court yard and shoot her bow for hours. Not the one gifted by a fairy tale come to life but one she had claimed for her own after the battle. After the Lion laid dead on a table. After a twelve year old who had been sent from one war for her safety was dropped into another and handed a weapon. She’d fire her weapon into the target again and again and forced the memory of the sound of an arrow hitting flesh to be replaced by an arrow hitting straw and wood.

Sometimes she remembered at night. Sometimes the dreams jerked her from her sleep and forced her awake and sweating. At twelve years old she became queen after a war. The memories of the war drove her from sleep and to a lit branch of candles. She’d find solace in the library. Reading the histories that the Badgers had began to record in word and not just memory. The war wouldn’t be the first time her arrows found flesh and not straw but if she could just be a good enough queen maybe she could prevent it.

At fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, she sometimes remembered England. She remembered how she used to wear shoes that pinched and dresses that itched. She remembered holding the responsibility of her siblings and being afraid. Now she wore silk slippers and dresses that flowed over her growing curves. She remembered being ignored. She wasn’t ignored anymore. Not only did the men of the court and visiting courts listen to her but they started to look at her now. They offered her drinks, asked for dances, for rides in the orchard.

This was when Mrs. Beaver made sure she knew where kits came from.

The memories still came in the daylight. But now she had visiting dignitaries to entertain, council meetings, treaty negotiations. Her country had been rebuilt from 100 years of neglect and cruelty. Rebuilding that took three years, but they rebuilt it. Now they had to keep it. That meant establishing
trade, creating alliances and a hundred other things.

The memories still sometime came at night. But now she often had company. There were two queens who could marry and and two kings who could help produce heirs. It didn’t matter if the elder queen choose to keep her bed warm at night. The elder queen could never leave her country. Any heirs she produced would belong to Narnia. Any husband she took would have to leave his land and come to hers. Her heart and her soul belonged to Narnia, her body belonged to herself.

The witches who acted as healers and midwives could prevent a child from growing inside her. Her bed companions could keep the nightmares away- at least most of the time.

Her days were so full she didn’t have time to remember.

Still sometimes Susan remembered but she could never go back so it didn’t really matter did it?

Sometimes it was easier to tell herself that her life started at twelve and everything before was just a dream from a long time ago. Especially when she was twenty, twenty-one, twenty five. Especially when she’d been a queen in Narnia longer than she had ever been a child in England. Narnia was her world and her responsibility- England was just a dream.

Than they were sent back. She was twenty-seven, on a hunt with her siblings, planning a fantastic feast when they returned and an even better night with her latest bed partner and suddenly she was twelve, stumbling out of a wardrobe into a room she’d almost convinced herself was nothing but a dream. It had been fifteen years but no time at all had passed here.

Susan didn’t remember much of the next few months. They passed in a haze of foggy dreams (memories) of this world coming back to her. They passed in sweat soaked nightmares and her fleeing to the professor's library. If time stopped here did it speed up in Narnia? What was happening to her people?

How did she live without her responsibility to them?

The professor found her a bow and she cried when her child’s muscles could hardly pull back the string. It gave her something to do however, something more than remember and mourn. She began to train her body again. She swam in the pond, ran down the halls, lifted her own body weight. The physical exhaustion helped quiet her mind enough that she moved out of the fog.

She remembered Narnia. She remembered the parties she threw to keep bodies off of the battlefield. She remembered how she perfected her smile to be polite and interested. She perfected her smile again, practising in front of the mirror, trying to remember this body and this face. She hated it.

She remembered her arrows hitting flesh as she shot into a tree in the yard. She remembered all the times where her parties and her planning and her treaties didn’t work and she needed to use strength to keep her people safe. There was still a war going on here in England and for the first time since she was twelve (the first time she was twelve) she couldn’t do anything to stop it.

She remembered sitting over maps with her siblings and planning battles, refugee care, field hospitals and reconstruction. Here all she could do was sit by the radio and listen to the names and numbers of the dead. She could see the other itching in this new/old skin. Peter’s fingers played with the knives at dinner and she knew he remembered holding a sword. She saw Edmund reach behind his ear for the quill he used to keep there- wanting to send codes and letters to their spies. Lucy couldn’t go an hour without reaching for her cordial or her little dagger. Things that she had never gone without for
Helpless all of them, children in England.

They had never really been children in Narnia. Not Edmund with his guilt of betrayal, not Lucy who healed the dying. Not Peter who wielded the sword as an extension of his arm. Not Susan who wielded charm, diplomacy and a bow. Peter was in the battle, Edmund around it, Lucy after it and Susan above it—watching and telling what she saw as she fired her arrows.

During the day Susan ran, played and remembered with her siblings. Forcing the memories, talking about them, seemed to keep the bad ones away. The professor helped. He listened at the very least. He found swords, daggers and bows for them to practice. He let them do as they needed to do.

At night Susan fled to the library and read until her eyes were grainy with sleep and her mind too tired to call forth nightmares. Now the past of her country didn’t scream at her but the future did. She wondered every night what was happening.

She wondered every night if this was just a dream and she’d wake up in her chambers, with her tax reports and seating charts in her study and her current lover in her bed.

It was so much worse than a dream. It was real. This body had never felt a lover's body, this body was still learning to run, to shoot, to be strong.

She still couldn’t remember her mother’s face. She still couldn’t remember anything but her father’s war haunted eyes. It had been fifteen years.

It had been one year.

They were eventually parceled off back to London. The city was now safe for children who had been promised to a magical war and who had fought in their battles. At the train station none of them could remember their parents enough to pick their faces out of the crowd. They stood on the platform clutching their suitcases and each other’s hands because they needed to just feel a little bit safer. These adults in children’s bodies looking for parents they could barely remember.

They stayed for a bit, stayed with these strangers who were their parents. They called up decades old memories and tried to stuff them back into their child bodies. Soon though they were packed and parceled again, this time back to boarding school. They didn’t make it through.

They had to back to Narnia. Back to the kingdom they had been stolen from. Back to see the ruin of their abandonment. They hadn’t wanted to leave, they never thought they’d leave, but they did. They left with no plans in place. They knew exactly what would happen if one of them died of battle, disease, or assassin plan but none of them knew what would happen if the Lion that crowned them took them back to a home they’d forgotten.

They weren’t to worry. They were called back to save the day. Put a new Blessed King on the throne and leave again. For good this time.

Sometimes she remembered Narnia. She remembered when her sister tossed her head regally and laughed when older girls said magic was a game for children. She remembered when Peter held counsel in the student government. She remembered when Edmund in this child’s body weighed his words with an adults consideration. She remembered when she picked up a bow in her physical education class and hit the target perfectly each time.

She went to her dorm and cried to the shock and surprise of everyone but Lucy. Lucy who sat with her and told her stories of other worlds. Anywhere but England. Anywhere but Narnia.
Sometimes she remembered Narnia. She remembered when she carefully learned to apply this world's cosmetics and fashion. She remembered the weight of the jewels her lovers and ambassadors had gifted her in lust of her body and in lust of peace between kingdoms. She remembered the weight of her crown as she pinned on her hat. She remembered the dresses that flowed over her curves when she put on tight, scratchy confining clothes.

Sometimes she remembered Narnia. She remembered as her body grew and men and boys let their eyes linger over her again. She remembered as her hair grew longer and longer. She remembered as she cut her hair in the shortest style that was still fashionable. She didn’t want that weight hanging from her head as a daily reminder.

In this world she didn’t rule a country. She didn’t protect her people. She didn’t do anything. In this world she couldn’t even rule her own body. She turned fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, and no kind Mrs. Beaver came to tell her where kits came from. Her mother only told her to be a good girl and wait for her husband before she was ever alone with boys. The girls in her school were just as ignorant as she had been, just as longing as she had been with none of the resources she had been gifted. She taught them as best she could, little warriors who just needed a bit of power over themselves.

Sometimes Susan remembered Narnia. When she volunteered as a nurse in the war clinics. When she wrapped bandages with hands that used to hold a bow. When the boys she cared for woke screaming from the ghosts that haunted them. When they looked passed her with haunted eyes.

Sometimes Susan remembered Narnia. She remembered how Mrs. Beaver smelt of home, safety and comfort. She remembered that she could rule her own body. That she could stop wars from happening in the first place. She could prevent children from coming home from the front lines with lost and haunted eyes. She could lose herself in books and meetings and in a lover's body. She could be something.

Sometimes Susan remembered Narnia and it didn’t matter. She could never go back and even if she could it wouldn’t be her land. It’d be somewhere new all over again. Somewhere where the time had passed to the point where she wasn’t even a legend anymore. Where not even the Badgers knew her name. Countries change and grow and she was now a relic of a forgotten past.

She started to write. Things that no reputable place would let a woman publish. So she sent them in under different names. She tried on different names until she settled on Frank Cornelius. The first king of the country she swore she forgot and the name of the Doctor of a man she could have cared for if it didn’t hurt too much to remember. She’d see her columns in the paper and smile with her friends. The same little warriors she found at school and taught where kits come from and it’s ok to own your own body. One of them proof read her articles every Sunday at tea.

The stipend she earned from her pieces of politics and policy allowed her to rent a small flat with several of her little warriors. One was a secretary, one was a shop girl, one was a seamstress. All girls from good families who wanted to be more than mothers and wives. They shared a tiny little flat with two of them to a room. It wasn’t much but it was theirs. They all pitched in with everything and the phone down the hall let them call their families when the money was too tight for a visit.

Susan’s parents didn’t understand but they supported her. Susan’s siblings were both angry that she didn’t want to remember and confused that she needed her own life in this world.

Maybe they would have understood someday. They never got the chance though. A train took them all at once. Every member of her family that she liked and spoke to were gone in the blink of an eye.

It turned out when you are the sole surviving member of several estates you gain a decent family inheritance. Another girl took her bed in the tiny cramped flat and she found one to rent by herself.
She wrote her articles. She held tea at her flat for her warriors every Sunday. It didn’t matter anymore that she had been a good girl from a good family. There was no family left to be accountable to her reputation. She started returning the lingering looks men gave her. The nightmares were back and another body fueled by lust and whiskey could help chase them away.

“Aren’t women supposed to be gentle?” an American asked with the smoke from his cigar swirling around the pair of them.

“I haven’t been the Gentle for a thousand years.” she replied tasting the bite of whiskey leftover on her lips. “I have no desire to be gentle now.”

“What do you want then doll?”

“To forget. I think you want that too.” She said as she placed a practised hand against his thigh. She had retaught this body how to seduce and knew her old self would be proud. She watched the American’s eyes darken and flick down to her hand and smile.

“Well, here’s to forgetting.” He said tossing his hand in the air to flag the bartender for a final drink.

An hour later they were walking arm in arm back to her flat. His breath tasted of cigar smoke and whiskey and she knew her lips tasted the same. She let him brace her against her flat door once it closed and in turn grabbed his hand to trail it from her cheek down to her waist. For one of the first times in this body she felt the heat begin to pool in her stomach again. She’d had a fumbling tumble with a soldier the summer she was seventeen, eighteen and nineteen. She wondered if she’d only ever find companionship in soldiers with haunted eyes.

“John.” She asked confused.

“My name, it’s John.”

“Susan. Pleasure to meet you. Please return to what you were doing.”

She woke in the morning to an ache between her legs and mind rested from a night without nightmares. John sat at the edge of the bed with a picture held in his hands. A woman and a small child smiled up from the crumpled paper.

“Who are they?” she asked as she sat up. She didn’t bother to clutch the sheet around her.

“My family. They’re back in America.” John answered.

“Why didn’t you go back. The war is long over.”

“Things I did? I can’t be a father or a husband any more. Should have said that last night if that’s what you’re looking for.”

“I’m not. I can’t be a wife or mother. I found I like my freedom too much. Breakfast? I have a lunch appointment this afternoon.”

The next time she saw him at the same dingy bar near her flat they shared a whiskey again before he followed her back. In the morning she gave him the number to ring for her flat. The third time he rang her flat and brought the whiskey with him. On the little balcony they shared the familiar bite of whiskey and burn of a cigar.
“I still love my wife.” he said the fifth time.

“I still love my freedom.” she replied laid out in her bed, the bruises from his hands and teeth starting to appear on her hip and waist. She could see the marks of her nails trailing down his bare back as he went to the washroom to find a flannel.

“Leave some rubbers when you go in the morning. I’m almost out of ones to give to the girls. I have some monies from my last article I can give you for them.” she called stretching her aching muscles.

The tenth time he asked about the picture of her family she kept on the nightstand.

“I lost them to a fairy tale.” she said, “I lost them because I kept a promise I made nine years ago.”

“I made a promise to my wife and daughter before good old Uncle Sam came knocking on my door. Guess in the end I couldn’t keep either.”

“Neither could I.” Susan said reaching for the whiskey tumbler. She drained the glass and kissed him hard. She let her teeth nip at his lips and brought his hands to grip her waist tightly. Together they chased their demons away.

The twentieth time she told him she couldn’t love him either, she’d love and lost too much to feel that again, but she cared for him and he helped keep her demons away. He told her he felt the same.

She lost count of how many times when she offered him to move in with her. The picture of his family sat next to the picture of hers. They still didn’t love each other. He still loved his family and she still loved her freedom but they kept the nightmares from each other and the companionship made the world feel a little less empty. She didn’t wake up from nightmares looking for Lions amongst the bodies of dead fairy tale creatures and he didn’t wake from nightmares of bodies dead in the trenches.

Sometimes Susan remembered Narnia but it didn’t matter. She could never return. She was condemned to England with it’s dreary skies to live with a man she could never truly love- who could never truly love her- and write articles under a name that wasn’t hers.

Sometimes Susan remembered Narnia but it hurt too much. She settled into and with her life in England. It was enough.

It had to be.
Let’s talk about Susan.

Let us not redeem her from forgetting but let us not damn her either.

Do not force Susan to apologize for surviving. Give her the dignity of her choices, the few she had.

Blood has always been the mark of womanhood. Girls are not allowed to shed an enemy’s blood to save themselves or their families. Women are measured by the blood in their wombs or blood staining their marriage bed. Their lives can be boiled down to stained sheets. Men are measured by what they build and women are measured by what they bleed.

Chapter Notes

This one is one of the darker ones. No major trigger warnings. Mentions of PTSD, panic attacks and Narnia typical violence that comes from war with bow and arrows.

This one examines what having everything taken from a person can do to them. Hope you enjoy and thank you for the comments everyone has been leaving. They make my day!

Let’s talk about children. Let’s talk about sticky fingers and messy faces and fantasy worlds built on green lawns and in old houses. Let’s talk about games and stories and relatives sneaking you bits of sweets and extra dessert. Let’s talk about star gazing and thinking of the world’s found in story books.

Let’s talk about being the oldest girl. Not being the oldest mind you. That’s Peter’s job and boys are allowed to be boys until they are made into Kings. Boys are allowed to be children- even when they are the oldest.

“Sit quietly Susan.”

“Don’t mess up your nice dress Susan.”

“Help your mother Susan.”

“Don’t be silly Susan.”

“Mind your sister now Susan.”

Let’s talk about spending her entire childhood cutting and clipping bits of herself away. Let’s talk about becoming who others need her to be before she even knows who she is. Let’s talk about
becoming a Queen before blood ever stains the inside of her thighs.

Blood has always been the mark of womanhood. Girls are not allowed to shed an enemy's blood to save themselves or their families. Women are measured by the blood in their wombs or blood staining their marriage bed. Their lives can be boiled down to stained sheets. Men are measured by what they build and women are measured by what they bleed.

Let’s talk about titles. Let’s talk about bestowing ideals unto children, growing them to become morals and stories as they become Kings and Queens. Peter became the Magnificent King. He stood in Aslan’s glorious brilliance and ruled with light blessed upon him. Edmund became the Just King. The sins of a boy who accepted kindness and sweets into his scared little heart now weighed the rights and wrongs of the people of the country. Lucy became the Valiant Queen with her pure and faithful heart and her sharp tiny dagger. She rode on to battlefields and healed the sick and dying.

Susan was Gentle, mild tempered, tender and kind. There is strength in kindness but what about when it is the sum of one’s entire being? She had a bow and shot arrows into the heart of men who committed no greater sin than obeying their king. She learned how to arrange her face into cold impassive features as ambassadors tried to woo her for the benefit of their lands. But she was still the Gentle. The title had been bestowed on her by a god and became the sum of her being. What a prize, the Gentle and beautiful queen. Mild, calm, moderate in action, soft. Susan put everything she had into her country and she still cut bits of herself away to be what everyone needed from her.

Let’s talk about war. Let’s talk about how the skies above her burst into flames as another country tries to cause as much destruction, as much death so they can kill anyone who does not look a certain way. Let's talk about how these countries fight over these invisible lines called borders. Let’s talk about how death is weighed against profit and the sacrifice of the poor is considered minor loss. Let’s talk about fathers who come home from the trenches broken in body and mind. Let’s talk of news of death camps and wondering who was next.

Let’s talk about children. Children sent away from exploding skies to the country. She’ll be safe she’s promised. The sky won’t light up with fire, rocks and debri won’t fall from the sky and crush her and her family. Or at least not her brothers and sisters.

Let's talk about children sent away from one war and promised to another. Let's talk about children who think they’re safe for a few short months even if their mother and father aren’t. Let’s talk about the youngest child. The one pure of heart. The one who falls through a wardrobe and finds a new world. Let’s talk about the youngest boy. The one who feels lost in the middle, his brother the leader, his sisters the responsible little mother and the youngest dreamer. Let's talk about someone noticing him first. Someone talking to him first. Someone valuing him first. Let's talk about the oldest, the leader, the idealist, the promised High King.

Let’s not forget the oldest girl. Let’s not forget the responsible little mother. The one who is forced to be practical in this strange fairy tale world. She helped Mrs. Beaver bundle food and supplies as they fled the house. She found them jackets in the wardrobe. She asked questions.

Susan had nightmares for the entirety of both of her childhood’s. Blood, gore, broken bodies filled with griffin fletched arrows or riddled with bullet holes. It sometimes seemed her entire life was measured in blood. When her cycle came there was talk of finding an alliance with another country. She killed men in defense of a country she didn’t know existed before she ever bled from her womb. When she was shoved back into her twelve year old body she was shoved back into a country in the middle of war. The sound of guns and bullets replaced the thump of arrows in flesh. The broken bodies of dryads, fauns and other fairytale creatures were replaced with men she saw wandering the streets of London once they returned from exile.
Fifty years after she returned from Narnia PTSD was added to the American DSM. Susan read the articles and the studies. She remembered being a child, before puberty, before she kissed a boy, before she kissed a girl, before she felt the strange stirrings of lust, before she grew breasts, before so many things she killed men in defense of the country she was promised to. She remembered dancing with both her feet and her words as she learned politics from a centaur and history from a badger.

She remembered the nightmares that plagued her life for fifteen years in a magical world and fifty in England. She remembered how it was thirty years before she could look at a train without feeling her breath jerk from her body. She thought of how she hadn’t set foot on a train in fifty years. How she couldn’t bring herself to reach to the back of wardrobes or closets. How she held her breath when she walked too close to the forest. The tree’s didn’t move in this world and she always thought they might at first. Even fifty years later.

She thought of night terrors and panic attacks that she hid from the world. She thought of how she refused to marry the boy who loved her because he too might be taken away. How she refused to stay the night with the woman she met in a dark house party because she couldn’t sleep without the little knife tucked under her pillow.

She loved her country, her land, her people, her family and they were all taken away from her.

There was only so much pain a woman could let herself go through.

At twenty-seven Susan became twelve again. At thirteen (really it was twenty-eight) she was banished permanently, at twenty-one (thirty-six) every single person she loved was taken away from her.

Let’s talk about loss. Let's talk about how nine (twenty-four) years of nightmares makes one bitter. Let’s talk about how the loss of one’s family, one’s childhood (both of them) pounds whatever soft and gentle bits a person had into sharp edges. When Gentle is her legacy and it’s never enough she can cast the title off her shoulders.

Let’s talk about being a Child Queen but never a Princess. Princess’s are raised to be Queens you see. They pass each mark of childhood knowing the responsibility that will one day shroud their shoulders. Let’s talk about learning state and politics from the cradle. Let's talk about how Susan never had these lessons. She went from being responsible for her little brother and little sister to being responsible to an entire country. A country she had known for less than a week.

Let’s talk about becoming bitter.

Let’s talk about how after the death and destruction of war, let's talk about after the death and destruction of countless tiny wars fought over fifteen years. Let’s talk about sacrifice. Let’s talk about cutting passion from her bones and laying it out on the sacrificial altar to become the beautiful, the Gentle. Let’s talk of creating her entire being into what a country needs.

Let’s talk about being banished.

Let’s talk about trying to find her place in this old strange world where still still has to sacrifice her passion but there is nothing given back in return.

“Susan, don’t challenge your teachers.”

“Susan, be a good girl won’t you?”
“Susan what happened to you?”

She couldn’t scream at them. She couldn’t tell them how she grew and became a Gentle Queen. She couldn’t say she rode with a Lion, look at his deathbed and combed his hair. She couldn’t tell them she had fled from Kings who would force her to be his Wife. She couldn’t say she’d killed more men than she could count in defense of those who depended on her. She couldn’t tell them she might not know the number but she could remember the sound of an arrow hitting flesh. She couldn’t tell them that the memories rolled around in her head until the drove her from sleep and running to the loo to retch up whatever she managed to eat that day.

Let’s talk about how the Gentle Queen learned to understand the Wicked Witch. Let’s talk about how she could see how Jadis had become who she’d been destined to be. Let’s talk about reaching the point where there is nothing left to give and everything she gave still wasn’t enough.

Let’s talk about shoving twenty-seven years of memories into thirteen years. Let’s talk about bleeding for the first time a second time. Let’s talk about leaving a lover in a cold bed. Let’s talk of nightmares that feel like prophecies of her country falling to strangers, of Animals being tortured, of banishment, of everything she built falling into ruin. Let’s talk about begging a Lion to spare her people and hearing no answer.

Let’s talk about going back and finding her dreams were kinder than anything she could imagine. Let’s talk about wandering through the ruin of her castle, finding her chess piece. Left over from a time where she could do something.

Let’s talk about being the last one left. Let’s talk about spending nine years jerking awake in a cold sweat. Let’s talk about nine years of trying to forget everything she had been and trying to settle for what she was. Let’s talk about all of this.

Let’s talk about becoming cold and bitter.

Let’s talk about taking a diplomat’s tongue and turning it into a reporter’s pen. Let’s talk about doing whatever is needed to find about backroom deals, scandal and powerful men who forgot their duty to the ones who put them in power. Let’s talk about sharpening a knife and a pen and destroying those who refuse to do their duty.

Let’s talk about seeing those in power and knowing she could do better.

Let’s talk about hardening her heart.

Let’s talk about Susan.

Let us not redeem her from forgetting but let us not damn her either.

Do not force Susan to apologize for surviving. Give her the dignity of her choices, the few she had.

Let’s talk about Susan who did not choose to become Queen, who did not choose to become the little mother, the Gentle, the Damned, the Banished, the Retuned, the Banished Again, the Last.

Let’s talk about Susan who did not choose to go to a magical land but choose to be what the land needed her to be.

Let’s talk about Susan who did not choose to leave but choose to live anyway.

Let’s talk about Susan who had everything taken from her and survived.
Let's talk about Susan.

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